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**Testimony on Raised Bill 186: AAC Child Protective Services Workers
Committee on Children
February 23, 2016
Submitted by: Stephen Karp, LMSW**

The National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter supports raised bill 186: AAC Child Protective Services Workers. We believe that this proposed legislation is one part of creating a system of reduced threat and harm to social workers, especially but not limited to those who practice in the community.

There are three generally recognized approaches to developing systems that will afford social workers needed protections when performing their job, both in agency settings and the community. The first approach is to have each agency formulate a safety plan of action. The second approach is to train each social worker in safety measures and prevention steps that can be done to de-escalate situations where the potential for harm may be present. These first two approaches are detailed in the *NASW Guidelines for Social Worker Safety in the Work Place, 2013*

<https://www.socialworkers.org/practice/naswstandards/safetystandards2013.pdf>

The third approach is what is being proposed in Bill 186. Such legislation exists in at least three states, West Virginia, Louisiana and Illinois. The West Virginia law includes representatives of state government and health care employees, the Illinois law covers public officials and human services professionals where the state contracts with the service provider, and the Louisiana statute is specific to child protective workers. In addition, several other states are working on or in the past few years have passed social work safety legislation related to mandated safety training and requiring safety plans within social service agencies. This issue of social worker safety is receiving growing attention nationally, including recent introduction and/or passage of legislation in Massachusetts, Kansas and Wisconsin. It is most timely for CT to begin to statutorily addressing this concern.

Violence against social workers has become an inherent risk of the profession. While the social worker is there to help the situation, it is not always seen that way. Protective service social workers are generally at a higher risk than some other areas of practice when it comes to threats of harm or real harm by clients and others who are involved with the client. The nature of a protective services visit by nature can be seen as a high tension moment. Social workers are being asked to address issues of potential or real neglect, abuse and exploitation. Such encounters need not be negative but they are difficult situations where the possibility of client's fears, apprehensions and misunderstandings of the purposes of a protective services visit may lead to the social worker being threatened or harmed.

Expansion of this legislation to all state employed social workers and those social workers who work for agencies through state contract, as provided by the Illinois statute Public Act 098-0529 (2013) should be given consideration either now or in the 2017 session.

Social workers have the right to their personal safety when performing their work. Protective services social workers recognize the risks that come with their chosen field of practice. But that does not mean that risk to self or property should be seen as just part of the job. There is no guarantee that a social worker will not be threatened or harmed, however the state has a responsibility as the employer to minimize that risk. NASW/CT supports this legislation's as one of the three necessary means to address the very real violence facing social workers: threatening harm, actual harm, or injury to property. This legislation makes a statement that such actions are not acceptable and come with the consequence of a class C felony. We urge the Committee on Children to favorably act on bill 186.